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ABSTRACT

In this series of convention papers, the presentors reviewed the phenomenon of retention, summarized what is known and not known about the causes of attrition on the college campus, traced the efforts of the Grand Valley State Colleges' Retention Committee and the colleges, reviewed the colleges' research information, and presented the all-college Retention Plan. Efforts to improve the campus environment, streamline administrative procedures, improve advising systems, and implement an innovative New-Student Orientation Program are reviewed. (Author)

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DOING FOR RETENTION:

STUDENT AFFAIRS AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COOPERATION

NASPA Conference
April 2, 1978

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DOING FOR RETENTION: ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COOPERATION

NASPA CONFERENCE

4/2/78

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Introduction

The purpose of this program is to delineate and describe the cooperative efforts of the academic and student affairs units on the Grand Valley State Colleges campus in the area of retention, research, orientation, advising, and student support.

We will review the phenomenon of retention and attrition; briefly summarize what we know and do not know about the causes of attrition; trace the cooperative efforts of the all-colleges Retention Committee and the Colleges; review the Colleges' Institutional Analysis Office reports relative to the parameters of the problem; and present to you in the form of four brief papers the Retention Plan, the research efforts, the innovative new-student orientation and tracking program, and the revised College of Arts and Sciences' (the Colleges' largest and most-traditional college) advising system.

First, some historical background: Grand Valley was chartered as the State of Michigan's 13th state-supported, four-year institution in 1964. The initial class of students numbered 226. In the next eleven years, Grand Valley's student population grew at an outstanding rate until it reached a full-year equivalent student size of approximately 6500. During these formative years, projected enrollment increases suggested that we could contiue to grow until we reached a FYES of nearly 15,000 students by 1985. Because of this growth, and because of demand, we established alternative colleges and increased our program offerings.

By 1975, we noticed for the first time, two startling facts: (1) numbers

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of new students begin to stabilize and, at the same time, (2) average student credit hours decreased, that is we had more part-time students, and attrition rates which were never before a concern, increased. The net effect, of course, was the first real decline in total credit hours earned. We were, in fact, becoming a smaller college.

Initial analysis of our retention and attrition data suggested that Grand Valley's retention rate approached a mere 60% (That is, only about 60% of those students elgible to enroll returned for subsequent fall terms.)

To study the problem, and to coordinate the necessary retention efforts, a Retention Committee was established in January, 1977 which had the responsibility for coordination of support programs, the assessment of the institutional climate of the various colleges, the development of proposals for program development to aid the Colleges' retention efforts, and the examination of existing policies which might impede retention efforts. The Retention Committee also has a major responsibility for assisting the executive officers and the Deans in the establishment of appropriate policies and practices, distribution of personpower and financial resources, and the coordination of essential support services.

The membership of the committee included the Deans of Student Development and Student Life, the Assistant Deans of each of the four undergraduate colleges, the Registrar, the Counseling Center Director, the New-Student Programs Director, the Admissions Director, and the Assistant Director of Institutional Research & Analysis.

Shortly after the formation of the committee, I (as chairperson of the Committee) made the following comments to the Grand Valley community:

Retention and attrition are a campus-wide problem; they can be affected through a combination of institutional policy changes, reassessment and reallocation of resources and staff, development of a commitment to action, development of select (but comprehensive) programs, on-going evaluation and research, and all-campus attention and involvement. For us here, as elsewhere, our potential retention agents are around us. We have good faculty accompanied by enthusiastic teaching and advising, measingful academic and non-academic programs, adequate support services with as much attention given to the physical, psychological, social and developmental aspects of growth as to the cognitive and inteleectual, and involved students.

The challenge is obvious. To reduce attrition (while at the same time recognizing that dropping out represents the best possible option for some) we must selectively recruit our faculty, staff and students; we must address ourselves to the individual needs and concerns of our students; we must constantly evaluate our priorities and commitemtns; we must realize that achieving competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, establishing a personal and career identity, and clarifying purpose are major developmental tasks of most of our students; and, most important of all, we must address ourselves to the needs, concerns and motivations of our students.

Since the publication of that statement, the Retention Committee as a whole, various subcommittees, the colleges, and the student affairs staff have vigorously attacked the problem of unwarranted attrition. Advising systems have been developed, selected advisors have received some basic training, a new orientation program for entering students has been developed, and several different research and treatment approaches have been attempted. Finally, after months of deliberations, some band-aid efforts, some politicing, and further committee discussions, the Retention Committee presented and received approval for a plan of action which I will distribute to you after our discussions. Basically, the plan establishes agreed-upon correlates of attrition, identifies desirable institutional policy goals, and establishes an outline for a plan of action.

By accident, or as a result of increased consciousness among all Grand Valley persons, January 1, 1978 saw a decline in the up-to-now increased rate of attrition; in fact, for the first itme, reports indicated a slight decrease in the attrition rate of degree-seeking students from Fall-to-Winter term.

We've made some progress - most significantly, I believe, in the orientation and advising programs and in our institutional research which you will hear about in the papers presented next. We'll continue to work toward our policy goals; we'll focus on efforts which allow for the improvement in communications the decrease in administrative red-tape, the improved congruence between student and p

gram choices, the increased attention to necessary support needs, and, as we do it, we know we'll need to make some fairly difficult decisions. At first it was relatively easy because the necessary changes were so blatantly obvious--now, as we continue, we'll attack those institutional conditions and priorities that prove risky and possibly costly, that cause us to do differently that which we do, and that will, we hope, provide the students at GVSC with a more meaningful, purposeful, and hassle-free education.

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DOING FOR RETENTION: AN APPROACH TO ADVISING

By

Charles W. Sorensen

Grand Valley State Colleges

As a faculty member now entering the ranks of administration, I feel somewhat like a puritan in Babylon, an individual foregoing the isolated beauty of the ivory tower for a world where students are frequently called "products", where items are "prioritized", where units "interface", where potential is "maximized", and where student drop-outs are "attrits". I have experienced a bit of discomfort with much of this language, but yet I find this new environment exciting because here everyone shares a common concern and embraces the philosophy that students are our first priority. Indeed, I have come to appreciate more fully the great need for close cooperation between academic and non-academic units and the significant role played by the latter in providing quality education to all students. The many stereotypes I have held about such areas as the Student Development Office have broken down and I hasten to add that I find it challenging, indeed, to work with such ambitious and talented individuals such as Ty Wessell, Bob Doud, Bruce Tweddale and others from various service units at Grand Valley. To a large degree it has been the initiative of people such as these that have prompted academic units to assess the effectiveness of the advising systems in the colleges and pressed for needed changes.

Advising has become a number one priority in CAS because, as the largest of the four undergraduate cluster colleges at Grand Valley, we are concerned with a student attrition rate that reflects the national norm. In a study compiled by the Office of Institutional Analysis, only 39% of those non-graduates enrolled in Fall term, 1975, were enrolled for the Fall term, 1977. While we know that a percentage of these students are legitimate drop-outs and others probably are simply interrupting their formal education for different options, this still indicates an attrition rate of well over 50%, an unacceptable rate for the College of Arts and Sciences. Within the total CAS student body, there are at least two distinct sub-groups that we believe may need

particular attention, the undeclared major and the entering freshmen. While the difference is relatively slight (82.6% vs. 81.8%) more persistors had declared majors than non-persistors. Since CAS had nearly 25% of its total student body in the undeclared category, this assumes some importance for the future direction of advising. More striking are the entering freshmen. Only 59% of the entering freshmen in Fall, 1975 were enrolled for Fall term, 1976. The significance is more apparent when this is compared with 85.4% for sophomores, 86.6% for juniors, and 86.6% for seniors. Freshmen may well hold the key to Grand Valley's future retention effort.

If colleges are to deal effectively with student retention through academic advising, they must resolve at least two significant issues; an organizational model for a system, and a definition of advising to provide a general direction. In my opinion, we have dealt successfully with each. After agonizing over the question of whether we should adopt a centralized advising system (staffed and controlled by professional advisors) or a decentralized system controlled by individual academic units relying on teaching faculty to do the bulk of the academic advising, we chose a system that reflects the federated nature of Grand Valley. Academic units provide all academic advice to students, but we cooperate closely with the Student Development Office in the areas of career counseling, testing, and personal counseling. Moreover, since advising can embrace many areas of responsibility and reflect countless personal philosophies, Grand Valley endorsed a conceptual definition, stating that advising is "a developmental process directed toward assisting each individual student in the realization of his/her maximum potential". While such an endorsement reflects the campus-wide concern we have, it nevertheless permits the individual colleges freedom to develop or change systems to meet special needs or philosophies.

Even though we could agree in the Retention Committee on a general organizational structure and even a general definition of advising, there remained the most sensitive and significant problem; convincing the faculty that strengthening the advising system was essential. Here, I believe, is a good example of the close cooperation between the All College Retention Committee and individual academic units, for the committee did

an excellent job of stating the problem to the academic community in such a way that everyone understood the gravity of the situation.

The Office of Institutional Research, for example, not only published quarterly reports showing the real decrease in student headcount as well as student FTE's, but then distributed those reports to all academic units so the information was common knowledge. In addition, the assistant deans from each undergraduate college were appointed to the Retention Committee, reinforcing the magnitude of the problem and the significance of the retention effort in their respective colleges. With that established, the CAS Dean's Office then contacted key faculty for their support. In addition, we worked closely with the CAS governing structure, supporting recommendations from an advising task force appointed by the Dean of the College (including an ex-officio member from the Dean's Office) which, in effect, embraced the general principles of the Retention Committee. Although we met with some initial resistance from certain faculty as we introduced our advising system in the Fall of 1977, we now have rather broad support for the system, a key factor for the future success of academic advising at Grand Valley.

While recognizing that individual students must assume the ultimate responsibility for their academic careers at any institution, the College of Arts and Sciences has nevertheless adopted an "intrusive" advising system, one designed to insure close advisor/advisee contact. This system has three main components. First, the college adopted an internal permit-to-register system (separate from the all-college system controlled by the Registrar) which requires students to return to their academic advisor each term for a computer validation card. The cards, numbered sequentially and distributed to individual academic units within CAS, must be signed by the academic advisor after reviewing a students present program and overall academic progress toward graduation. Collected by the Registrar at the entrance to registration, these cards are returned to the Dean's Office and tabulated by the computer. This provides precise data on numbers of unit majors, which faculty are providing the bulk of advising, and where the trouble spots are in the advising process.

While it is yet too early to confirm what the impact will be, the system, initiated in the Fall term, 1977, has had some positive results. For example, over 95% of all the students did see and consult with an academic advisor and probably 100% will for the Spring term, 1978. There has also been a noticeable decrease (18%) in undeclared majors since we started the system because in our personal contact with students, in our special mailings, and in our requirement for a validation card before a student can enroll for classes, we have emphasized the significance of regular advisor/advisee contact. And, finally, the number of schedule adjustments during the first five days of any term (drop/add period) dropped dramatically (approximately 20%) the first term the validation system was in effect. Why? We believe that more advisor/advisee contact resulted in better course selection.

The second important component of the new system is the use of the CAS Advising Center. Supervised by an assistant dean, the center consists of eight trained student academic advisors. All undeclared students are assigned to the center and receive all academic advice from a member of the center, the CAS graduation auditor, or an assistant dean. All students who use the center are encouraged to declare majors so an academic advisor can be assigned permanently. This system, enforced by the validation card procedure, insures that the 25% of our students who remain undeclared are receiving academic advice.

The third segment of the advising program is now in the development stage but promises to be one of the most important and exciting aspects of the new system. In effect, an assistant dean in CAS will become the dean of freshmen students. Using a corps of 25-30 selected faculty (remunerated for their efforts) all new freshmen will be assigned an advisor immediately after admission to the College of Arts and Sciences. Students must indicate what general interest area they have (arts, math/science, social science, or the humanities) and an individual from that general area will be assigned to them. If incoming freshmen are quite certain of their major, they may declare and receive an advisor from that unit immediately. Most, however, will be assigned an advisor from the pool who will provide close, personal counseling on academic programs

and general requirements until the student feels comfortable with their choice of a major. Students will be encouraged to declare as soon as they are certain, but must do so by the end of their third term.

This system, we feel, will provide several advantages. Each student will know who to see that first day on campus if they must and will always know who their academic contact is. This may go a long way to overcome the feeling of frustration and isolation often experienced in a new social/intellectual environment. Second, we will have an excellent group from which to collect data on advising effectiveness, expectations, and needs.

Greater service to our students remains the first goal of academic advising but there has been another very positive aspect developing from this process, greater cooperation between the academic and non-academic units, particularly the Student Development Office. Academic units have generally been reluctant to associate with such areas, assuming that very little could be gained through any cooperative efforts. At Grand Valley, the all-campus retention effort has removed many of the barriers and stereotypes. There have been positive results in at least three areas. First, the new student Orientation Program, housed in the Student Development Office and supervised by Bob Doud, works closely with the College of Arts and Sciences to insure that incoming students receive close personal attention, accurate program information, and a warm welcome. Second, the two offices (in addition to the other cluster colleges) through a sub-committee of the Retention Committee are developing a general advising handbook for the faculty. Intended to supplement, not replace, academic handbooks on academic requirements, it will deal with approaches to advising, identify key resource people on campus, and clarify the services available to all students. And third, CAS is using the services of the Counseling Center, housed in the Student Development Office, to refer students for career testing, career counseling, personal counseling, and in some cases skill development. It is doubtful such cooperation could have resulted if Grand Valley had not initiated the all-college retention effort.

While we are excited about the new direction at Grand Valley, there are areas that must be developed and questions that must be answered. For example, some individuals are concerned that our intrusive advising system actually denies the students freedom of choice and, in effect, is a return to the principle of in loco parentis. We must carefully avoid assuming all responsibility for students and insist that they remain responsible for career choice, program options, and general electives. Moreover, we must also develop more fully effective audit procedures on the advising systems, provide effective training workshops for faculty, deal as effectively with transfer students (who frequently have complex transfer-of-credit problems) as we do with freshmen students, and develop an effective evaluation procedure for academic advising. But even with all that remains to be done, we have taken that first initial step to reaffirm that students are our number one priority at Grand Valley.

Doing For Retention: An Analytical Approach

One truly courageous aspect of the team approach to the retention efforts outlined by Ty Wessell was the inclusion of a "number-cruncher" like me on the Retention Committee. All too often, efforts of this kind are marked by a certain blind adherence to preconceived notions about the nature of the problem at hand. This situation is somewhat akin to that of the man who recently bought a huge new Cadillac. He was asked how many miles per gallon he was getting, and he blithely announced that he was getting twenty miles per gallon. When his questioner looked at him a little askance, he explained that the essence of being the owner of a Cadillac was a feeling of prosperity. He knew that, given the current price of gasoline, he couldn't feel very prosperous getting only 10 m.p.g., so he had his odometer modified so that it registered one mile every 10,560 feet. Like we tend to do so often, it was more important to have a feeling of well being than it is to have the real facts.

As a Retention Committee, we certainly started out with some preconceived notions about why students left college prior to graduation. These preconceptions were the net result of our own experience in higher education and a review of the literature on the subject. In our original plan, we set forth these assumptions on reasons for attrition:

1. Academic, personal, or social problems and/or failure.
2. Absence of purposefulness and direction among the students.
3. Mismatch between student and college or program leading to dissonance.
4. Perceived barriers and hassles by the institution upon students.
5. Social isolation, lonliness, depression, and lack of identification between students and their environments.

Underlying these five assumptions were ~~two~~ three additional unstated, but crucial, assumptions.

1. Most students leave because of institutionally induced problems.
2. That the five reasons for leaving previously listed would primarily affect the new student coming directly from high school.
3. If these institutionally induced problems could be overcome, the retention rate could be reduced.

Much to the credit of our Retention Committee, these assumptions have not been transferred to the realm of fact merely by virtue of group concensus. There is a conscious and continued effort to subject these "assumptions" to reality testing.

Our first efforts focused upon an attempt to quantify and describe the nature of our attrition problem. How many were leaving? Who were they? Do they come back after they've left?

We knew that, because of the nature of our institution and our location, we had a rather complex and rather atypical student body. When we really started looking at the data, we found that the complexity was much greater than we expected.

For instance, we tracked the attendance patterns of all of the students who were enrolled during Fall, 1975, over the next two years. Since we operate on the quarter system, this meant that we were looking at eight different terms. For those of you who are mathematically inclined, the total number of attendance patterns which are possible over eight terms is equal to two to the eighth power, or 256 total possible patterns. When we looked at our situation from 1975 to 1977, we found that we actually had students who exhibited 187 of the possible 256 patterns! The permutations and combinations of enrollment patterns exhibited by some of our students almost defied any rational explanation.

How atypical our student body is was revealed by the fact that only 11% of the students in this study followed the "normal" academic pattern of attending Fall, Winter, and Spring terms while taking the Summer term off over the two year period. Another indicator of the complexity of our problem is the fact that, while our total enrollment for Fall, 1976, was 7,540, we actually enrolled nearly eleven thousand different students during the 1976-77 year.

So we knew we had a complex attendance problem. The next question was, why? Why were we getting such erratic attendance patterns? We had some hints from prior information. From a study of why new freshmen chose Grand Valley, we knew that one-third of those who came from within driving distance of our campus really wanted to "go away" to college, but couldn't afford it. We also knew that the average age of our student body was increasing. In addition, we had embarked on a conscious effort about four years ago to better serve the potential student who held down a full-time job in our metropolitan area. The question was, how had all of these factors affected our attrition problem?

We then set about to gather some good information about those students who do leave us. We did a mail survey of all students who were enrolled during Fall term, 1977, who did not re-enroll for the subsequent Winter term. We are just in the preliminary stages of analyzing the data, but it is already evident that some of our original assumptions about the reasons for attrition might be suspect.

To illustrate, let me outline just a few of my tentative conclusions based on this most recent study.

1. For many of our students, the fact that they did not re-enroll was <u>not</u> a reactive decision. Fully 57% did not even <u>intend</u> to receive a degree from Grand Valley when they first enrolled. That fact alone should do something to alleviate our

institutional paranoia! Over half of those who left were using our services for some reason other than receiving a degree from Grand Valley.

2. Financial considerations play a much smaller part in the process of attrition than we had generally believed. Only 12% said they left because of a financial problem, and over 90% of those who left for this reason felt that this was only a temporary problem.

3. We knew that many of our students also hold full-time jobs, but we tended to think these were primarily graduate students or students in Continuing Education. As it turns out, fully 48% of our undergraduates who did not return for Winter term said that they were employed full-time while attending Grand Valley during Fall, 1977. While we currently have no way of knowing whether the 48% figure is true for all of our student body, the very fact that it showed up in this sample makes it a little easier to understand why we have difficulty getting our undergraduates involved in traditional student activities.

4. Contrary to popular opinion, not all students who leave have negative opinions about their experience with us. 82% said we had met their expectations, while 83% answered "yes" to the question "If you had it to do over again, would you still have attended Grand Valley?". The respondents to this survey often cited areas where they think improvement can be made, but feel that we provided a viable service for them and only 25% definately do not intend to return at some later date.

5. Academic programming is a crucial factor. The orientation of many of our students is toward course and program availability, not toward institutional affiliation. Rather than coming to Grand Valley for a "banquet", they're more likely interested in a "progressive dinner".

6. Under the best of conditions, Grand Valley could probably only have affected the decisions of 25% of these students who did not re-enroll. An examination of the reasons for leaving shows that the other 75% left for reasons which are really beyond our control, and I might say, make good sense when you read their comments.

Does all of this mean that our Retention Committee should fold up its tents and silently slip away? I would venture to answer, "no". Rather, what we should be doing is changing our assumptions in light of new evidence. We started out by saying "How can we keep them from leaving?". Perhaps we should now shift our focus and begin to say "How can we improve our programs and environment so that the students will want to return?". Using my earlier analogy, we should not be grumbling about the fact that so few have come to our "banquet", but rather, how can we get those who came to our table for the appetizer or soup course to return for the main course along with dessert and coffee?

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Allendale, Michigan 49401
April 2, 1978

ORIENTATION AND MONITORING OF NEW STUDENTS

I. Prior to Enrollment

Grand Valley State Colleges begins an active recruiting season during the month of September and continues through the following August. A major concern confronting the campus during this 11 month interlude is what happens to early admit students and how do we maintain their interest, or in some cases increase their interest, in Grand Valley State Colleges. The Office of New-Student Programs was established, in part, to be responsible for all newly-admitted students between the period of being admitted and the point of enrolling.

The key factor toward which all efforts are aimed after admissions is the development of an identification with Grand Valley. The New-Student Programs Office works in a coordinated effort with the Admissions Office to:

1) Oversee the information flow about Grand Valley to all newly admitted students
2) Serve as the primary link between students and the college
3) Provide information concerning newly admitted students to advisers and the colleges
4) Coordinate orientation and advising sessions for all entering students
5) Assess and communicate information about new-student needs to the Grand Valley community and student support units

A second major effort is made to encourage contact with the Office of New-Student Programs by all new students and their parents. During this period of transition, between being admitted and enrolling, the parents of first-time-in-any-college students (FTIAC's) often play a major role in the student's decision-making process. Grand Valley has enlisted students in conceptualizing and writing a Parents Almanac to Grand Valley. This guide is sent to the parents of any new FTIAC student and to the parents

of transfer students who indicate they would appreciate its being sent. The Almanac speaks to parents about Grand Valley, the programs offered, changes they might expect in their sons and daughters, where to "harvest" their concerns, and the types of questions they may have and where to call to get answers for them.

In addition to the parents, the New-Student Programs Office encourages through all of its literature that new students contact the office directly with personal concerns and questions. This form of encouragement has increased significantly the written and phone inquiries to the Office of New-Student Programs. Simultaneously with the increased emphasis for new students to call the office, a new response procedure went into effect. Any student who sends a written inquiry to the New-Student Programs Office is called personally if they live within a 100 mile radius within 24 hours. If they live outside the 100 mile radius, a written response is mailed within 48 hours. All responses are handled in a personal matter with informal stationary. This rapid turn-over rate of responding and the personal aspects of calling or writing a personal response has created a very positive halo-effect that Grand Valley is a place that cares.

Orientation programs at Grand Valley have undergone a change in philosophy that we think is now more reflective of the personalized and meaningful approach that students desire. Whereas in the past, orientation was 2-3 days in length, costly...$15-20 per student paid by the student, had a heavy emphasis on social activities, and relied too exclusively, in our case, on students performing faculty functions, the new orientation program has attempted to streamline itself. Orientation/registration at Grand Valley is a one-day affair offered five times during the summer. There is no cost involved with attending except what students pay for their meals served on campus. Every new student who attends is encouraged to bring a friend

(why come alone) and social life options are offered which enable a student and friend to stay overnight in the residence halls and take part in social activities.

The cornerstone of the orientation/registration days is the academic advising process. Each of the four undergraduate colleges at Grand Valley has made a commitment to providing improved faculty advising during the five summer orientations. The approach may differ from college to college, but in each case a student advocate center (or advising center) has been developed to deal with the incoming and returning students. The purpose behind the re-emphasis on academic advising and involvement of faculty instead of students, has been to deal with what we at Grand Valley find to be the primary source of anxiety of new students: "What shall I take... and how do I do it?" The orientation day is carefully structured to emphasize academics, to allow for necessary placement tests in writing and math (that are scored quickly so students can see how they relate to the academic advising process), and to provide an opportunity to meet with an academic adviser in the student's intended area of interest. The advising is often one-to-one in the smaller colleges and in small group fashion in our largest undergraduate college. Students who are undecided are not made to feel inferior; on the contrary, we recognize that a large percentage of 18 year olds are undecided. Each college provides generalists from their student advocate centers who work intently with the undecided. The advising process culminates in determination of a fall course schedule based on interests, placement test scores, ACT information, and student desires.

The final step after course scheduling is to go through the class registration process. In this case our registration set-up is exactly as it would be during any other time of the year and new students experience it in a very positive manner. If then, we have achieved our orientation

goals, a new student leaves orientation knowing his/her adviser or where to get one assigned, leaves registered for fall classes, and, leaves with a clearer image of his/her educational goals. A student's primary anxiety of what courses to enroll in should be relieved. A benefit of this program has been to foster an early, positive identification with Grand Valley which enables our students to enter in the fall more relaxed...and perhaps with their friend in tow.

As Dr. Wessell has indicated, we had reasons as an academic institution for altering our orientation approach. Research on our campus and on other campuses, indicated we needed to be more attentive to at least three persistence factors relative to retention at Grand Valley. These were:

1) An entering student's academic ability, which our placement tests are designed to address
2) The development of identification factors with Grand Valley, which we think are fostered by early and positive interaction with academic advisers and the colleges
3) The entering student's commitment to an educational goal, which the advising and registration process enables us to get a handle on.

II. Identifying High-Risk Students

The second major theme of this paper deals with efforts at Grand Valley to identify high-risk students. I have just indicated that one major factor of persistence is the commitment to an educational goal for new students. Prior to orientation/registration we try to identify the high-risk student.

Many of the factors which we use to identify the high-risk student are based on information readily available but not always used. In addition, we have begun a rather intensive research analysis of the characteristics of students who attrited from Grand Valley, with the hopes of finding, through factor analysis, some baseline profile characteristics.

Currently, we review ACT profiles looking at English and math scores as well as the composite score to determine where a student's strengths lie and where the weaknesses are. The ACT profile also indicates to us if Grand Valley was a student's first choice...a factor which may be of assistance in projecting transfer data...information about decidedness of major, and a self-reporting grading on how well one expects to do in college. A review of each of these areas can provide us with an idea of how well the student has done, what they themselves think of their potential, and what are their career expectations and are they realistic.

High school grades also provide us with the best indicator of past achievement and best projector of future success. Beyond GPA we look at the type of college prepartory classes taken with strong review of the basic areas. The type of school attended is important as Grand Valley draws many students from small rural school systems where competition and standards may differ. Our research is aimed at correlating how students from different size and types of schools perform at Grand Valley. Whether a student is decided or undecided about an undergraduate major may serve as a tip off that they are high risk. This factor alone is very normal, but if coupled with low high school achievement or a very rural background, it may serve as an indicator of special needs.

The admissions policy at our state supported institution is open through August and into September. We look for late summer admits as a potential high risk group (research). In fact, FTIAC's admitted after September 1 have a much higher attrition figure than do transfers admitted during the same period. Whether a student attended an orientation/registration program serves as an indicator of their educational commitment. In addition, the orientation mailings to new students include a simple needs analysis of 5-7 items on which students indicate areas they feel they

need assistance. Three of the most common areas indicated are, study skills assistance, library usage training, or career development workshops, and each of these may serve to collaborate, with the other information gathered, whether a student is high risk.

Finally, any student who upon applying to Grand Valley has below a 2.5(?) high school GPA is required to take diagnostic testing in reading, writing, and math through the Developmental Skills Institute on campus. Low achievement scores require up to one year or no more than 30 credits in an individualized competency based remedial program. This program very readily identifies academic high risk students and offers them academic programs that will ease them into the educational mainstream before they have jumped in and gone down for the third time.

III. Monitoring New Students and the Programs Offered

The third major area of concern for the New-Student Programs Office, once we have worked with new students prior to enrollment and after we have identified the high-risk student, is to monitor the success of new students and work towards the development of programs which will increase success experiences. Retention research has verified that there are two significant factors affecting the attrition of students: first, a feeling on the part of students of being isolated or "out of touch" (this may involve lack of support from home) and second, a feeling of dissonance or approach-avoidance about their academic goals and their academic program.

The New-Student Programs Office assists students in having self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and attainable goals by working closely with academic advisers and the student advocate centers. The Counseling Center co-sponsored with the New-Student Programs Office a fall series of eight weekly seminars titled "Themes at Three." "Themes at Three" were held for undecided new students and offered assistance in study skills,

social relationships, understanding sexuality, and goal setting. Career exploration workshops and library usage workshops have been offered to new students who have indicated a need for such assistance. The New-Student Programs Office has developed, in conjunction with the Counseling Center, the Placement Office, and the Student Employment Office a four year career development model for Grand Valley which is depicted in a soon-to-be-published, Career Pathfinder Guide. In conjunction with the career development opportunities, the on-campus Student Employment Referral Service has established contacts with hundreds of employers within our three county area and can assure any student who inquires a job. The job opportunities are available both on and off campus on a part-time basis during the academic year and often on a full-time basis during the summer. The benefit of this effective on-campus workstudy or job program has been documented to have a positive impact on student retention. The factors which contribute to jobs impacting positively towards higher retention rates are that: jobs enhance campus involvement, jobs create a sense of belonging and self-worth, and jobs foster identification with the institution.

The final phase of the personalized transition process into Grand Valley involves monitoring the new students throughout their first year. A computer system enables the New-Student Programs Office to work with student data which does not violate the student's privacy rights. I have already mentioned factors which we record that may indicate whether a student is high risk or not. Application date to Grand Valley, attendance at orientation days, whether they are a declared or undeclared major, the information they provide on the needs analysis about what they perceive their needs to be, their declared areas of interest on the ACT profiles, and who their assigned adviser is, all provides information on which I can correlate high and low-risk students. I attempt to provide this type of information to academic advisers so they may address a particular student's needs more directly.

If programs are offered in study skills, career development, library usage, goal setting, money management, or whatever, I can use the needs analysis data to provide a mailing list of students who have indicated an interest and need. At the completion of each academic term, grade point averages can be included, so I will know which students are in danger of failing. At this point, I may contact students personally or they may be contacted by their advisers or by units, such as the Counseling Center, which offer services which may be of assistance.

The Grand Valley process of orientation has become a more personalized, academic experience which prides itself on working with students prior to enrollment and throughout that first year.

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